

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 07787 290211Z

64

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 /054 W

----- 023015

R 290111Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4580

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: AS, PINT

SUBJECT: SURPRISE LIBERAL PARTY MOVE TO TOPPLE

OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN FAILS

1. SUMMARY: IN SURPRISE MOVE NOV 27 GROUP OF LIBERAL BACK-BENCHERS FAILED IN EFFORT TO HAVE OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN REPLACE BY MALCOLM FRASER. BALLOT SECRET, BUT LEAKS TO PRESS INDICATED MOTION TO REPLACE SNEDDEN WAS DEFEATED BY MARGIN OF 49 TO 14. EPISODE THREATENS TO REOPEN DORMANT INTERNAL STRUGGLES WITHIN LIBERAL PARTY, ALL FACTIONS OF WHICH WERE DAMAGED BY EVENTS. MANY LIBERALS HAVE PRIVATELY MADE CLEAR THEIR LACK OF SUPPORT FOR SNEDDEN, BUT EVIDENTLY FEW WERE WILLING TO VOTE AGAINST HIM. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM AND ALP FIGURES GENERALLY WERE DELIGHTED WITH NEWS AND WILL BE SEEKING TO EXPLOIT THIS EVIDENCE OF OPPOSITION FACTIONALISM. END SUMMARY.

2. IN SURPRISE MOVE AT LIBERAL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS MEETING NOV 27 GROUP OF SIX BACKBENCHERS FAILED IN EFFORT TO UNSEAT OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN AS LIBERAL PARTY PAR-

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LIAMENTARY LEADER. VOTE OF 63 LIBERAL CAUCUS MEMBERS

FROM HOUSE AND SENATE (COALITION COUNTRY PARTY MEMBERS DID NOT, OF COURSE, PARTICIPATE) WAS SECRET, BUT LEAKS TO PRESS QUICKLY BROUGHT FACT THAT VOTE WAS 49 TO RE-TAIN SNEDDEN AGAINST 14 FOR HIS REPLACEMENT. UNSEATING OF SNEDDEN WOULD HAVE ENDED HIS PROSPECTS OF BECOMING PRIME MINISTER, SHOULD LIBERAL-COUNTRY COLIATION WIN NEXT ELECTION.

3. MOVE WAS LED BY MHR TONY STALEY (ELECTORATE OF CHISHOLM IN MELBOURNE METROPOLITAN AREA) AND FIVE OTHER LIBERAL BACKBENCHERS. OBJECT OF THEIR EFFORT WAS TO INSTALL MALCOLM FRASER, OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN FOR LABOR AND PUBLIC SERVICE MATTERS, AS PARLIAMENTARY LEADER. STALEY HAD BEEN PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO SNEDDEN BUT RESIGNED TWO WEEKS AGO. HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION, MADE PUBLIC NOV 27, SPOKE OF PERSONAL REGARD FOR SNEDDEN BUT REFERRED CRYPTICALLY TO HIS VIEWS (EVIDENTLY NEGATIVE) OF SNEDDEN AS PARTY LEADER. AFTER VOTE STALEY SAID HE AND HIS ALLIES ACCEPTED PARTY DECISION, BUT HE HAS CONTINUED TO SPEAK HIGHLY OF FRASER AS POTENTIAL PARTY LEADER.

4. ANDREW PEACOCK, OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REPORTEDLY WAS OUTSPOKEN IN HIS SUPPORT OF SNEDDEN AND PROBABLY HAS EMERGED FROM WHOLE AFFAIR WITH ADDED CREDIT.

5. SNEDDEN COMMENTED TO PRESS LATER THAT EVENTS HAD CONFIRMED HIS POSITION AS PARTY LEADER, AND HE MADE CLEAR HE WOULD NOT SEEK TO HAVE FRASER REPLACED ON SHADOW CABINET. FRASER, FOR HIS PART, ISSUED STATEMENT DECLARING. "WHAT OCCURRED WAS INITIATED BY OTHER PEOPLE WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT. I TOOK NO PART IN WHAT OCCURRED THIS MORNING IN THE PARTY ROOM. I ASKED NO ONE FOR SUPPORT, NOR WOULD I." COMMENTING ON TV EVENING OF NOV 27 FORMER PRIME MINISTER GORTON, WHO HAS LONG AND OPENLY OPPOSED FRASER FOR ANY HIGH PARTY POSITION, SAID HE THOUGHT FRASER WOULD MAKE A "VERY BAD LEADER." GORTON ASID FRASER COULD HAVE HALTED ATTEMPT TO UNSEAT SNEDDEN, ADDING, "... MR. FRASER, AND I HAVE ALWAYS SAID THIS, IS SOMEBODY WHO DOES WHAT HE LIKES, WHEN HE LIKES, AND HAS NO REFLECTION FOR ANYBODY ELSE."

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6. LABOR GOVERNMENT FIGURES HAVE GREETED NEWS WITH REJOICING, RELIEVED TO NOTE SIGNS OF TROUBLE IN LIBERAL PARTY. IN PARLIAMENT NOV 27, IN RESPONSE TO SET-UP QUESTION, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM SAID, "IT WAS THE UNIVERSAL OPINION THAT NOTHING COULD SUIT THE GOVERNMENT BETTER THAN FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION TO REMAIN IN THEIR PRESENT HANDS." LABOR FIGURES HAVE

MADE MUCH OF INCAUTIONS REMARK MADE IN MELBOURNE BY SNEDDEN TWO WEEKS AGO THAT HIS POSITION IN LIBERAL PARTY WAS SO SECURE THAT MEMBERS OF PARTY WOULD WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DEATH OVER HOT COALS FOR HIM. PRESS CARTOONS NOV 28 GENERALLY SHOWED GROUPS OF LIBERALS OBVIOUSLY HESITATING OR REFUSING TO WALK OVER BED OF HOT AT SNEDDEN'S BEHEST.

7. PRESS HAS UNANIMOUSLY TERMED EFFORT BY LIBERAL BACK-BENCHERS TO HAVE BEEN SINGULARLY INEPT. MOST POLITICAL COLUMNS AND EDITORIALS HAVE COMMENTED THAT ALL FACTIONS OF LIBERAL PARTY COME OUT OF EPISODE DAMAGED BY EVENTS.

8. SEVERAL MEMBERS OF LIBERAL STATE EXECUTIVE IN MELBOURNE HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THEIR CRITICISM OF STALEY INITIATIVE. HOWEVER, ELECTORATE COMMITTEE IN STALEY'S DISTRICT OF CHISHOLM ISSUED STATEMENT NOV 28 SUPPORTING SNEDDEN AND STALEY.

9. COMMENT: ATTEMPT TO OVERTURN SNEEDEN AND REPLACE HIM WITH MALCOLM FRASER WAS ONLY A FLURRY, BUT IT UNDERLINES GENERAL LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR SNEDDEN AS PARTY LEADER. SIGNS OF FACTIONALISM IN LIBERAL PARTY HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLICLY IN EVIDENCE OVER PAST SIX MONTHS OR SO, BUT IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION MANY LIBERALS HAVE MADE CLEAR THEIR LACK OF REGARD FOR SNEDDEN. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT SNEDDEN HAS IMPROVED HIS PERFORMANCE AS PARTY LEADER, BOTH DURING MAY ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN AND IN SUBSEQUENT MONTHS. HOWEVER, HE IS NOT PARTICULARLY POPULAR LEADER, EVEN WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, AND HE CONTINUES TO TRAIL PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM IN POPULARITY IN OPINION POLLS, EVEN THOUGH LIBERALS AS PARTY HAVE BEEN WELL AHEAD OF ALP AS A WHOLE IN POLLS SINCE JULY.

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10. WHEN IT CAME DOWN TO A VOTE, HOWEVER, LARGE MAJORITY OF LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS WAS NOT PREPARED TO REPLACE SNEDDEN. STALEY, WHO MADE CLEAR HE HAD INFORMED FRASER OF HIS INTENTIONS WELL IN ADVANCE OF VOTE, HAD EVIDENTLY NOT COUNTED HIS NUMBERS ADEQUATELY OR TOOK A LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR SNEDDEN TO BE THE SAME AS A WILLINGNESS TO VOTE AGAINST HIM.

11. LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL GAIN SLIGHTLY FROM THIS INCIDENT, BUT WITH THE APPROACHING END OF PARLIAMENTARY SESSION AND BEGINNING OF SUMMER VACATION PERIOD IN MID-DECEMBER, INCIDENT LIKELY TO FADE AWAY. SNEDDEN'S LACK OF POPULARITY IN HIS OWN PARTY REMAINS A DEMONSTRATED FACT.
GREEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VOTING, PARTY LEADERS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, LABOR POLICY LINE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 NOV 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974CANBER07787
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740346-0279
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974114/aaaaacwd.tel
Line Count: 168
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 JUL 2002 by shawdg>; APPROVED <12 DEC 2002 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SURPRISE LIBERAL PARTY MOVE TO TOPPLE OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN FAILS
TAGS: PINT, AS, (FRASER, MALCOLM), (SNEDDEN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005